

Paul Hughes PhD proposal Feb 2020

11: Research Project Description

11a: Project title (17 / 20 words max)

Choreography as Curation as Hosting: Relational complexities and modes of production in an expanded field of practice

11b: Synopsis (300 / 300 words max)

Suitable for a general audience

This practice-as-research (PaR) PhD will investigate the possibilities and risks of choreography as a curatorial-hosting practice. It critically responds to a recent wave of projects by UK choreographers that commission and incorporate works authored by other artists (e.g. Siobhan Davies' exhibition 'material / rearranged / to / be', 2017). I use the concept of 'hosting' to foreground the relational complexities and modes of production unique to these choreographic-curatorial works. By collaborating with the internationally acclaimed dance house Sadler's Wells Theatre (SWT), I will directly explore how these emergent practices might circumvent and transform institutional power relations and curatorial processes.

This PaR process will develop an extensive studio practice that directly experiments with the materials and processes of choreographic-curatorial hosting. It will develop solo-authored artworks, and host practice by invited collaborators, through 'collective study' (Harney & Moten) and an 'ethics of incommensurability' (Tuck & Yang). Taking place in SWT, University of Roehampton and extra-institutional contexts, this project will address the potentials of hosting to challenge and innovate production models across the diverse economies of UK dance, and their respective legacies of systemic exclusion and colonial violence (Bhabra).

This PhD will develop this interdisciplinary research framework of choreographic-curatorial hosting within the emerging field of 'expanded choreography' (MACBA, 2012), where choreography takes on a generic capacity for analysis and production alongside and beyond dance. It will introduce to this field – and elaborate choreography's potential to revitalize – key debates from Institutional Critique (Buren, Wilson) on artist-curator-institution relations. The project will draw from continental philosophy (Derrida) and queer theory (Halbestram) to contextualise notions of 'hospitality', 'hosting' and the 'feral'; critical theory (Harney & Moten) and queer writing (Mitchell) on 'dispossession' and 'fugitivity'; and feminist (Freeman) and sociological research (Bourdieu) to address the power relations of peer-organising, within the unique economies of experimental art.

11c: Description (1231 / 1200 words max)

Describe the proposed research using the headings below in a way that can be understood by an academic who is NOT a specialist in your specific area.

1. Your research questions and why they are important or relevant. What contribution to knowledge will be made? What will be the outcomes of your research?
2. Your knowledge of the subject area including key literature, people, and recent findings.
3. Methods and approaches that will be used.
4. Research plan, timetable and challenges.

1. Research questions and contribution to knowledge

Choreographic-curatorial practices are developing new forms of collaboration and authorship within UK dance. They challenge established processes of commissioning and presentation. They have the potential to form peer-networks of vital support; strategically redistribute resources and access to historically dispossessed communities; and initiate systemic institutional change (Hemsley, Moran and Rustgaard, 2019).

Yet they pose significant risks: of merely offering a “temporary fix for deep structural problems” (GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN, 2014); of developing unaccountable power relations (Freeman, 1972); and of positioning artists as especially-moral agents (Wilson, 2015). This “social ecology of giving and friendship” sustains and intensifies the artist as “prototype of the contemporary flexible and precarious worker” (Kunst, 2015), within a wider neoliberal project that dismantles and defunds working structures and institutions.

This PaR project uses the concept of ‘hosting’ to critically examine this enmeshment of choreography and curation, with the following research questions:

- What are the activities and sensitivities that constitute a ‘hosting’ practice? What are the aesthetic and ethical urgencies and risks of one artistic practice playing ‘host’ to another?
- How do these hosting practices challenge or perpetuate the conditions of production, presentation, legitimation and systemic exclusions specific to the institutional, academic and independent contexts of UK dance?
- How might these hosting practices transform the historically contingent roles and power relations between ‘artist’, ‘choreographer’, ‘curator’ and ‘institution’?

This will result in:

- A series of artworks that articulate the urgencies and risks of choreographic-curatorial practices.
- The pilot of a new choreographer-curator project within Sadler’s Wells Theatre’s (SWT) public and / or artist development programs.
- A written thesis – including art and dance historical context, analysis of practice, and philosophical discussion – that develops the conceptual framework of hosting to critically address these as-yet-untheorised choreographic-curatorial practices.

Through this unique Collaborative Doctoral Award, this project will develop specific insight and practical models for SWT to accommodate these new ways in which UK dance artists are producing and presenting their work. As an internationally renowned dance house, and key figure for developing organisational policy of UK dance, SWT is best placed to disseminate this research throughout major dance organisations both nationally and internationally.

2. Key literature

This artistic research project springs from my collaborative work with Rohanne Udall as Channing Tatum, which explores hosting, peer-exchange and artist-institutional relations; for example, our role as hosts of our independent radio station 'Radio Play' (2017-19) that broadcasts audio works by invited peers. This PhD research will synthesise solo practice, further collaboration with Udall, and hosting of invited peers, to tease out the possibilities and contradictions of choreographic-curatorial hosting.

This artistic practice – and PhD project – is directly engaged with a national network of dance artists challenging the traditional roles of choreographer and curator. Siobhan Davies' numerous exhibition projects, including 'material / rearranged / to / be' (2017), present her own choreography alongside work she has commissioned by other artists. '52 Portraits' (2016), an SWT-produced digital project by Jonathan Burrows, Matteo Fargion and Hugo Glendinning, is composed of fifty-two videos by artists across the UK dance community. These project relate to recent initiatives by dance organisations that invite independent artists into curatorial roles – including SWT's 'Wild Card' programme (2014-20), Breakin' Convention (2004-2019) and Darbar (2017-19) festivals; Yorkshire Dance's 'Artist Curating Dance' (2017-18); and Dance4's Nottdance (2017-19) – yet differ by being framed as choreographies or artworks in their own right.

I will draw on debates from Institutional Critique that question the roles of artist, curator and institution. Daniel Buren accused Harald Szeeman's curation of Documenta 5 of positioning Szeeman himself as "the principal artist of the exhibition" (1972). An e-flux project revived Buren's critique to ask: "What happens if artists take over and occupy territory usually reserved for curators?" (Hoffman, 2004); yet Mick Wilson critiques the 'institution of the artist' itself as a figure of "bourgeois revolt" (Wilson, 2015). This PhD project introduces the choreographic to these debates.

This PhD project will critically contextualize the concept of hosting – and directly challenge claims of UK dance's "currency of togetherness" (Burrows, 2015) and "subversive generosity" (Doughty & Fitzpatrick, 2015:27) – through the work of continental philosophers, and critical, decolonial and queer theorists. This includes Jacques Derrida's analysis of the power relations of hospitality (2000), and Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's elaboration of debt (2013), within artistic and intellectual communities. Drawing from the work by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1993) on the 'inverted' economies of experimental artistic practice, I will assess how 'revolutionary hospitality' (Mitchell, 2019) of 'feral' practices

(Halbestram, 2019) might challenge the colonial legacies of institutional, academic and seemingly 'independent' contexts (Bhabra, 2019).

3. Methodology

The methodology of this project will be Practice-as-Research. Its methods will include:

- Studio practice: I will develop artworks and collaborations that research the potentials of 'hosting' as a choreographic practice. These encounters with professional artist-peers and organisations will form core objects of this study.
- A literature review of relevant choreographic and curation practice, and relevant discourse across dance studies, curatorial studies and philosophy: I will develop a robust and critical understanding of the key concepts, commonalities and distinctions between these practices.
- Interviews with choreographer-curators – and their artistic and organisational collaborators – across the UK: I will identify the motivations and concerns that inform these working practices. Any direct interviews will adhere to appropriate ethics procedures.
- Engagement with Sadler's Wells Theatre: I will shadow the SWT producing team to research their role of institutional curator, and how they invite independent artists into curatorial roles. I will support the team to develop understanding of curatorial-choreographic practices, and to pilot a new programme through which institutions can accommodate these artistic practices.
- Written reflection throughout the project that synthesises insights from these diverse processes: This will form the basis of a written thesis that articulates the new research framework of hosting for these choreographic-curatorial practices.

Henk Borgdorff posits that within artistic research, "art practice is paramount as the subject matter, the method, the context, and the outcome" (2012). By situating these research processes within SWT, this project will directly contribute innovative research to a major producing house, and offer new conceptual and practical models to engage choreographer-curators.

4. Research plan

Year 1: Engage with the research programme at University of Roehampton, and give introductory presentation at the Dance department's PhD seminar. Undertake surveys of artistic practice and theory, including past collaborative practice with Udall. Interview key practitioners and organisations. Solo studio practice. Shadowing producing team at SWT. Continuous written reflection. Engaging with TECHNE research community and events.

Year 2: Engage with theory to examine key concepts. Presenting artworks at institutional and independent contexts. Further studio practice with invited

collaborators. Working with SWT's producing team to design a artist-curator project within public or artist development programs. Continuous written reflection. Refining this PhD project's contribution to knowledge. Presentation at PhD seminar – and submission of artistic work and written chapter – for MPhil/PhD upgrade.

Year 3: Presenting collaborative studio practice. Undertaking artist-curator project at SWT. Continuous written reflection.

Year 4 (0.5 years extended core study due to Collaborative Doctoral Award with SWT): Evaluation of artist-curator project at SWT, consolidation of documentation and completion written thesis. Submission of the PhD project.

11d: Bibliographical References

Enter no more than 20 references

Bhambra, G. K. (2019) 'Whose Welfare? Colonial Regimes of Extraction and British Subjecthood'. [lecture]. At Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, UK. 5 December 2019. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXP2qoaONK0> [Accessed: 13/02/2020]

Borgdorff, H. (2012) *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Leiden University Press: Amsterdam.

Bourdieu, P. (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production*. (Trans. Johnson, R.) Polity Press: Cambridge.

Buren, D. (1972) *Exposition d'une exposition* [webpage]. Accessible at <https://danielburen.com/bibliographies/2/8> [Accessed: 17/02/2010]

Burrows, J. (2015) 'Keynote address'. DanceHE conference, Resilience: Articulating Dance 'Knowledges' in the 21st Century. De Montfort University, Leicester. 9 April 2015.

Burrows, J., Fargion, M. and Glendinning, H. (2017) *52 Portraits* [website]. Available at: <http://52portraits.co.uk/> [Accessed 12/02/2019]

Davies, S. (2017) *material / rearranged / to / be* [exhibition]. Curve Gallery, Barbican Centre, London. 20 January 2017–28 January 2017.

Derrida, J. (2000) *Of hospitality / Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond* (Trans. Bowlby, R.) Stanford University Press: California.

Doughty, S. and Fitzpatrick, M. (2016) The identity of hybrid dance artist-academics working across academia and the professional arts sector. *Choreographic Practices*. 7(1), pp. 23-46

Freeman, J. (1972) 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', *The Second Wave*. Available online at <https://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm> [Accessed: 17/02/2020]

GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN in (2014) D.I.Y. ed. Daniels, R. J. University of Chichester: Chichester

Halbestram, J. (2019) 'Becoming Feral: Sex, Death and Falconry', [lecture]. At Institute for Research on Women, Gender and Sexuality, Columbia University. Available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eG3L_eG96Tg [Accessed: 13/02/2020]

Harney, S. and Moten, F. (2013) *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Minor Compositions: Wivenhoe / New York / Port Watson

Hemsley, A., Moran, J. and Rustgaard, H. (2019) Artist. Curator. Leader. [talk] Nottedance????

Hoffman, J. (ed.) (2004) *The Next Documenta Should be Curated by an Artist*. Frankfurt am Main : Revolver.

Kunst, B. (2015) *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism*. Zero Books: London.

MACBA (2012) *Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects....* [online]. MACBA, Spain. 8 March 2012 - 31 March 2012.

Mitchell, L. (2019 [1977]) *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*. Nightboat Books: New York.

Tuck, E. & Yang, K. W. (2012) 'Decolonization is not a metaphor'. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. 1:1, pp. 1-40

Wilson, M. (2015) 'Artistic Research between Inquiry and Revolt: Artistic Research, the University, and the Trajectory of a Deleuzian Motif'. At *The Dark Precursor, International Conference on Deleuze and Artistic Research*. DARE 2015, Orpheus Institute, Ghent, Belgium. Available online at: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/224029/224030> [Accessed: 17/02/2020]